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## **Narrative before in English**

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# Narrative *before* in English

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Statement of Aim and Method

This paper takes up the descriptive challenge posed by narrative *before*-clauses in English: how should this relatively rare but fully productive construction be described?<sup>1</sup> Can it be accounted for revealingly and at the same time in a manner consistent with the description of the other uses of *before*? I am going to approach this topic on the basis of several thousand examples (for details, see below), a collection that serves as an empirical platform for my observations of patterns and tendencies, as a checklist to ensure proper representation of usage and as a source of illustrative examples for my exposition. I aim at an identification and characterization of the properties of narrative *before* and its delimitation from other uses rather than an actual corpus analysis with collocation patterns, statistics, and frequencies, which would presuppose the conclusions arrived at in this paper. My method is largely explorative and interpretative in a traditional, eclectic, Jespersonian manner. I freely employ relevant concepts from formal, functional, and cognitive linguistics (e.g. 'Main Clause Phenomena' or 'root transformations' from Generative Linguistics and 'assertive' in Langacker's and Christofaro's cognitive-typological sense) in my attempt to arrive at a better understanding of the complex syntax, meaning, and stylistics of narrative *before*-clauses. My ambition is to make up for the lack of attention to this construction in comprehensive university grammars of English (such as Quirk et al. 1985, Huddleston & Pullum 2002, and my own Bache & Davidsen-Nielsen 1996 and Bache 2000) and therefore employ several of their terms and diagnostic measures (e.g. 'comparative governor' and 'clefting') in order for this paper to qualify as a supplement to their work.

## 1.2. What is a Narrative *before*-Clause?

To give the reader a real, deep-felt sense of what a narrative clause is, I propose to go back a few years to a time when I myself was completely unaware of the existence of such clauses in connection with the temporal linkers *before*, *when*, and *until*. I was engaged in writing a text and exercise book on sentence analysis for first-year university students of English (cf. Bache 2014). I had reached the chapter on subordinate clauses and had offered the following example:

- (1) She immediately saw him *when she looked up*. (Bache 2014:99)

In this example, I argued, *when* is a subordinating conjunction, not an adverbial (as students often suggest). It initiates an adverbial subordinate clause (*when she looked up*) and links it to the main clause for temporal specification and contextualization of the situation expressed by the main clause ('her immediately seeing him'). Its role within the subordinate clause is not to convey temporal specification of 'her looking up', as an adverbial in the subordinate clause might, but to relate this content to the main clause as a temporal adverbial (Bache 2014:99). To clinch this fairly traditional (but theoretically of course not entirely uncontentious) point, I decided to offer another example containing a *when*-clause – after all, this was meant to be a pedagogical exposition:

- (2) Jenny was reading the newspaper *when suddenly the telephone rang*.

I started analyzing this sentence in exactly the same way as I did sentence (1), defining *when* as a subordinating conjunction and the clause it initiated as a temporal adverbial clause qualifying the main clause, when it dawned on me that something completely different was going on here (as, indeed, in the current sentence!) and that what I had written was embarrassingly wrong. Unlike sentence (1), sentence (2) was not so much about the main clause situation ('Jenny reading the newspaper') but about the situation expressed by the *when*-clause ('the telephone suddenly ringing'), and this situation happened while Jenny was reading the newspaper. Somehow the balance between the main clause and the *when*-clause in terms of their relative communicative

impact was very different from what I had expected and from what we saw in example (1): the main clause in (2) offered contextual information in support of the situation expressed by the subordinate clause, or rather by what looked like a subordinate clause. Judging from its communicative impact, the *when*-clause in fact behaved more like a superordinate clause.

To cut a long story short: I dropped the second example in my book – it illustrated too complex a phenomenon for the level I was aiming at – but decided to follow up on examples like (2) in a new separate project on what I came to appreciate as the "narrative" use of *when*-clauses (Bache 2015, 2016) – "narrative" in the sense originally defined by Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972:359ff.) and later developed in connection with *when* by Couper-Kuhlen (1988, 1989) and Declerck (1997). On Labov's definition, a clause is narrative if it adds a new event to the progressive sequence of main events making up a storyline. A sequence of narrative clauses iconically matches the sequence of events depicted. The term narrative hence applies unproblematically to many main clauses while many subordinate clauses are non-narrative because the events they express simply support, contextualize or elaborate on the event expressed by the main clause. In example (2), however, the *when*-clause is used narratively, despite the fact that it is not a main clause, in that it "push[es] forward the action" (Declerck 1997:213, 2006:731f.), i.e. it brings a new event to the foreground sequence of events making up the storyline. By comparison, the *when*-clause in (1) is used as a temporally specifying adjunct qualifying the event expressed by the main clause. There is in other words a temporal-narrative contrast in the use of *when*-clauses.

*When* is not the only linker in English with a recognized temporal-narrative contrast, as also acknowledged by Declerck (2006) (see also Bache 2015:11):<sup>2</sup>

- (3) They heard her explanation *before Jack called her parents.* (temporal)
- (4) They had hardly heard her explanation *before Jack burst out crying.* (narrative)
- (5) He was so happy *until he got married.* (temporal)

- (6) She was so enjoying life, *until she suddenly realized that all her efforts had been in vain*. (narrative)

Although *when*, *before*, and *until* differ somewhat both syntactically and in semantic detail, they are all three basically temporal and relational in meaning:

X when Y

X before Y

X until Y

In all three relations, the specific linker chosen plus Y may be expressed by a sentence-initial or sentence-final construction. In examples (1), (3), and (5) the combination of the linker and Y is expressed by a clause in sentence-final position, while in the following examples it is expressed by the corresponding sentence-initial option:

- (7) *When she looked up*, she immediately saw him.  
(8) *Before Jack called her parents*, they heard her explanation.  
(9) *Until he got married* he was really happy.

But the three linkers share the restriction of narrative usage to clauses in sentence-final position: a narratively linked clause takes its onset from a preceding main clause, and the combination always displays iconic sequencing in that the linear order of clauses reflects the order in which the situations expressed by the two clauses take place or begin. Thus in example (4) the main-clause situation ‘them hearing her explanation’ happens before the *before*-clause situation ‘Jack bursting out crying’, and in example (6) ‘her so enjoying life’ takes place before ‘her suddenly realizing that all her efforts had been in vain’. Temporal clauses are not necessarily iconic but may or may not be iconic depending on position and (in the case of *when*) tense choice (Bache 2016:276).

### 1.3. Why a Separate Study of Narrative *before*?

This paper takes a closer look at the narrative use of *before* on the basis of my findings in connection with narrative *when*-constructions (Bache 2015, 2016). In addition to the stylistic effect, which is very similar for narrative *when*-clauses and narrative *before*-clauses, there are certain formal and pragmatic parallels (to be specified below). But because of a comparative element inherent in *before* (= 'at an *earlier* time than'), which is absent in *when*, and because of its different syntactic properties, a different descriptive approach is required for *before*. More specifically I treat narrative *when* as a special metaphorical extension of the use of *when* as a sentential relative, i.e. as a relative pronoun that takes all of the preceding main clause as its antecedent (for discussion and examples of sentential relatives, see Bache & Davidsen-Nielsen 1997:274f.). A narrative *when*-construction is metaphorical in the sense proposed by Halliday (cf. Halliday 1994:ix; Halliday & Matthiessen 1999:7, 227-296, 2004:7, 592f., 613ff., 654ff.) in that *when* takes a non-temporal event expression as its antecedent and treats it as if it were a temporal expression (Bache 2016:287ff.). Unlike *when*, however, *before* is never used as a relative pronoun, and the concept of metaphor plays no role in narrative *before*-constructions. In sections 2.1 and 2.2, I will elaborate on the comparative meaning of *before* and its different syntax.

### 1.4. The Empirical Platform of this Study

The material on which this study is based consists in part of 4000 occurrences of *before* made up by four subsets of 1000 randomly selected examples from each of the following four electronic corpora available at [www.corpus.byu.edu](http://www.corpus.byu.edu):

NOW (News On the Web)	1000 hits
COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English)	1000 hits
TIME (Time Magazine Corpus, limited to 2000-2016)	1000 hits
BNC (British National Corpus)	1000 hits

These corpora include a variety of genres and both spoken and written language. One more electronic corpus was searched:

COLLINS (Collins Wordbanks Online)

2000 hits

The 2000 examples from this corpus derive from five samples: a general unspecified one (500 hits), US fiction (500 hits), British fiction (500 hits), US spoken (250 hits), British spoken (250 hits).<sup>3</sup> To get as precise a picture of *before* and its uses as possible, and since I did not know in advance exactly what would be relevant, I did not make any a priori restrictions on these hits: all sorts of construction with *before* were harvested. In each corpus I simply asked for a random set of x hits to be generated. The broad scope of the material helped me formulate the general presentation of the syntax and meaning of *before* in sections 2.1 and 2.2 below.

As a supplement to the electronic corpora I screened ten Kindle novels for all occurrences of *before* and got 1301 additional hits.<sup>4</sup> No principle was involved in the selection of the novels (listed in note 4) apart from an attempt to get a certain spread of recent types of narrative styles and a wish to see the use of *before* in more coherent contexts. The reason for selecting Kindle editions of these works rather than normal book form was that Kindle provides an extremely convenient search option for individual words and phrases.

In addition to the total of 7301 examples in my basic collection I have made many searches for specific combinations and illustrative examples in Google (e.g. *before suddenly*, *before finally*, *before gradually*, *hardly + before*, *scarcely + before*, *barely + before*, *before in came*, *before out rushed*, *before down came*, etc.). I also refer to and discuss examples provided by fellow grammarians and by myself. I offer source information after each example from my collection. The source information is presented exactly as it is offered in the corpus or novel itself. When an example is used several times I only supply the source the first time round. As already mentioned, the purpose of working with this corpus of examples is simply to ensure comprehensiveness and authenticity, not to conduct a formal corpus investigation.

## 1.5. Structure of Exposition

I begin my presentation of *before* with a general characterization of its syntactic and semantic properties as a temporal linker in section 2. The purpose of this section is to provide proper contextualization of the narrative use of *before*, more specifically the background against which this use stands out as rather special. Section 3 offers a discussion of both formal and pragmatic characteristics of narrative *before* in some deliberately clear-cut cases in an attempt to capture the essence of narrativity in connection with this linker and to identify the mechanisms at work. In section 4, I argue that there is a gray area between clearly temporal and clearly narrative uses of *before*, and that we therefore need a finer-tuned categorization of *before*-clauses. Finally in section 5, I arrive at my conclusion.

## 2. *Before* as a Temporal Linker

### 2.1. Syntax

In the basic relation 'X before Y' with 'before Y' in constructional postposition, Y may be realized by a finite clause, a non-finite clause, or a nominal, as in the following examples, respectively:

- (10) Flowers were placed at the graveside before *white doves and heart-shaped balloons were released in her memory*. (NOW: Country/date: GB 2016 (16-05-27), Title: Travellers burn four caravans of 'Queen of the Gipsies' and all of her ...; Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3613126/Travellers-burn-four-caravans-Queen-Gipsies-posessions-ancient-rite.html>)
- (11) Sarah schemed for several weeks before *daring to put forward a proposal*. (BNC: Date: (1985-1994); Title: The rich pass by. Pope, Pamela. London: Century Hutchinson, 1990, pp. 17-117. 2458 s-units)



- (12) Marathoners train for months and carbo load before *the actual race*. (COCA: Date: 2013; Publication information: New York: Hyperion, Edition: First edition; Title: The she-hulk diaries; Author: Acosta, Marta, Source: FIC: The she-hulk diaries)

While traditionally a distinction is maintained between *before* as a conjunction (as in (10) and (11)) and *before* as a preposition (as in (12)),<sup>5</sup> Huddleston & Pullum (2002:1011ff.) provide interesting arguments for always treating *before* as a preposition (and hence a constructional head), even in examples like (10) and (11). The implication of this approach is that prepositional heads may take not only nominals and non-finite clauses but sometimes also finite clauses as their complement. Subordinating *when* is also considered a preposition taking both finite and non-finite clauses but unlike *before* it cannot take nominal complements.<sup>6</sup> I am not going to take a firm stand in this debate (as it does not affect the central argument of this paper) but will continue to speak in traditional terms of (temporal and narrative) *before*-clauses' even if, strictly speaking, they may qualify as prepositional phrases with prepositional heads and clausal complements.

When temporal *before* takes a nominal complement, its referent is always construed as a temporally specifiable event (as in (12)).<sup>7</sup> Thus *before* often congruently takes a regularly recurring event or time expression as its complement:

- (13) Richard arrived *before dawn/dark/noon/lunch/supper/dinner/seven/curfew/assembly/Monday/May/*.

We do encounter nominals that are not usually considered event expressions serving as the complement of *before*:

- (14) In the old days, *before penicillin*, they could lead to blood poisoning and kill you.  
(COLLINS: doc.subcorpus: brbooks; doc.id: BB-cF86--29; doc.year: 1986;  
doc.period: before 1990; doc.titl: The other Devil's Name; doc.ctry: UK;  
doc.textform: Book; doc.domain: fiction; doc.publ: HarperCollins (Crime Club);

doc.crte: © Elizabeth Ferrars; doc.auth: Ferrars, Elizabeth; doc.ssex: F; doc.finf:  
Fiction; doc.isbn: 002319691)

But *penicillin* must here be understood metaphorically as representing some event, such as the discovery of penicillin (i.e. an object or 'thing' expression used as an event expression).

Particularly frequent collocations are *BC* (= 'before Christ', i.e. 'before the birth of Christ') and *before tax* (i.e. 'before tax is added').

Significantly, *before* cannot be used as a relative pronoun like *when* (= 'at which time'), as in *Jack postponed the meeting to next Friday, when the test results will be ready* (Bache 2016:285). This feature provides a syntactic frame for the narrative use of *when* (Bache 2016:291) but cannot play a part in the description of the narrative use of *before*.

*Before* may be used without an explicit Y:

- (15) If you ask me to compare this to places where we've done this *before*, I'd say there's a lot more at stake here. (TIME: Date: 2002/08/26; Title: Army On A Shoe String; Author: Mitch Frank; Source: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1003082,00.html>)
- (16) He flew even closer to the ground than *before*, and the plane began to buffet and shake from the steady blankets of heat. (COCA: Date: 2015; Publication information: Fall2012, Vol. 70 Issue 4, p770-778. 9p.; Title: The Man They Threw Out of Jets; Author Friedman, Bruce Jay; Source: FIC: Antioch Review)

In traditional grammar, *before* is here analyzed as an adverb.

Note also that *before* may be premodified – largely irrespective of the kind of complement it has – by an expression further specifying or quantifying the anteriority expressed:

- (17) Mitt Romney met Cameron ahead of the London Olympics in July 2012, *shortly before* the convention. (NOW: Country/Date: SG 2016 (16-06-01); Title: Donald Trump to visit Britain Day after Brexit vote; Source:

<http://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/donald-trump-to-visit-britain-day-after-brexit-vote>)

- (18) Bournemouth Airport recommends arriving at the terminal *at least 2 hours before* departure. (<http://www.bournemouthairport.com/flight-information/flight-departures/>; access date: 4 June 2017)

In such constructions the premodifier + *before* (+ complement) sequence constitutes an adjunct of time.

## 2.2. Meaning

*Before* basically expresses anteriority and is used for the temporal ordering of 'actualities' (situations, occasions, times, things, facts) such that one actuality (X) is anterior to another (Y).<sup>8</sup> *Before* thus indicates relative time. For example, in sentences containing a *before*-clause at the primary clausal level (as in *He arrived before the ceremony began*) the situation X expressed by the main clause ('him arriving ...') is anterior to the situation Y expressed by the *before*-clause ('... the ceremony beginning').

As noted in section 1.3, there is something comparative about *before*, its meaning being close to the comparative expression *earlier than*, and it is in fact descriptively possible to approach *before* as a 'comparative governor' (as suggested in passing by Huddleston and Pullum 2002:1104). I would like to explore this possibility and begin by identifying the standard components of comparative adjectival constructions like those in (19) and (20) (the following fairly traditional approach to comparison takes its point of departure in Bache & Davidsen-Nielsen 1997:473ff. and Bache 2000:244ff.):

- (19) Nithe is *taller* than Arthur. (COCA: Date: 1991; Publication information: Pocket Books, New York; Title: In The Shadow of the Oak King; Author: Courtway Jones; Source: FIC: In The Shadow of the Oak King)

(20) She almost hesitated to tell me that she found Calvi *more beautiful* than Greece.

(BNC: Date: (1985-1994); Title: Elizabeth and Ivy. Liddell, Robert. London: Peter Owen Pubs, 1986, pp. 15-111. 1819 s-units)

In such sentences there are four components relevant to the discussion of comparison: a gradable property, a comparative marker, a comparative basis, and a comparative focus. In (19) and (20) the adjectives (*tall*, *beautiful*) express the gradable properties involved, *-er* and *more* are comparative markers indicating a higher degree or rank (the suffix *-er* being a morphological marker and *more* a syntactic one) and *than Arthur* and *than Greece* express the comparative basis, i.e. the standard against which the comparison is made. In the two sentences, *Nithe* and *Calvi* are in the comparative focus, i.e. the ones being described in terms of the gradable property. In the case of morphological comparison (*taller*), the gradable property and the comparative marker are fused into one word.

Similarly, one way to describe:

(21) He arrived *before* the ceremony began.

([https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/class-struggle/post/missing-that-cap-and-gown-moment/2011/07/21/gIQAHR89QI\\_blog.html?utm\\_term=.8f533e0654ed](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/class-struggle/post/missing-that-cap-and-gown-moment/2011/07/21/gIQAHR89QI_blog.html?utm_term=.8f533e0654ed);  
21 July 2011; access date: 4 June 2017)

is to say that *before* represents a synthetic fusion of a gradable property and a comparative element (resulting in a meaning corresponding to 'at an earlier time than'). In (21) *the ceremony began* expresses the comparative basis, and *He arrived* is in the comparative focus (being sequentially positioned relative to 'the ceremony beginning'). More specifically, the comparative basis is the time of 'the ceremony beginning', and the comparative focus is on the time of 'him arriving'.

The important point, both in connection with adjectival comparison and with *before*-constructions, is to note the asymmetry between the two actualities X and Y involved in the

comparison: one serves as the comparative basis (Y) while the other is in the comparative focus (X), i.e. it is characterized in terms of the gradable property. Thus (19) and (20) are descriptions of *Nithe* and *Calvi*, not of *Arthur* and *Greece*, and (21) is a temporal specification of *He arrived*, not of *the ceremony began*. More technically, the main clause situation in (21) is asserted (in conjunction with the *before*-clause situation) while the *before*-clause situation is presupposed. In this respect, regular temporal *before*-clauses are just like regular temporal *when*-clauses (Bache 2015, 2016). The main clause carries the main message, and the subordinate clause has a supportive role. It is a truth condition of (21) that 'He' arrived before the scheduled beginning of the ceremony, but not that the ceremony actually began: it could have been cancelled at the last minute. As Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1007) note:

The presupposition triggered by *before* – that the event expressed in its complement subsequently took place – thus has only the status of an implicature even in the positive declarative, and as such it can be cancelled.

This is more obviously true of this example from their discussion:

(22) Ed died *before he finished his thesis*.

Quirk et al. (1985:1081) note that an example like the following is ambiguous between a factual and non-factual reading of the *before*-construction:

(23) I sent a donation *before I was asked to*.

In the factual reading, 'I' was asked after having already sent a donation; in the non-factual reading, 'I' wasn't asked but could have been asked. While the clause in the *before*-construction may or may not express something factual, it is not assertive like the main clause.

In addition to the central temporal meaning of *before*, there are a number of derived meanings and uses where the notion of anteriority is somewhat bleached or associated with other meanings. For the sake of completeness I will briefly comment on examples with such meanings.

As noted by Quirk et al. (1985:1081), *before*-constructions can be used for the expression of implausibility, preference, result, and conditional threat, cf. their examples:

- (24) Pigs will fly *before he'll become a mathematician*. (implausibility)
- (25) He'll beg for food *before he'll ask his parents for money*. (preference)
- (26) I had to put my complaint in writing *before they would take any action*. (result)
- (27) Go *before I call the police*. (conditional threat)

What Quirk et al. call preference, as in (25), sometimes comes across rather as strong determination not to do what is mentioned by the *before*-clause:

- (28) I'll die *before submitting to you again*. (COLLINS: doc.subcorpus: usbooks; doc.id: BU-iF742385; doc.period: before 1990; doc.titl: THE WOLF AND THE DOVE; doc.ctr: US; doc.textform: Book; doc.domain: fiction; doc.publ: HarperCollins; doc.crte: ©1974 by Kathleen E. Woodiwiss; doc.auth: Kathleen E. Woodiwiss; doc.ssex: F; doc.fint: Fiction; doc.isbn: 0-06-053207-6)

In the data collected for this paper I have also encountered a fair number of examples in which *before* is used with an anticipatory meaning: X takes place to prevent, avoid, or prepare for Y, as in the following three examples respectively:

- (29) Now it was up to him to get the youngsters out, *before they were trapped and incinerated*. (prevention) (BNC: Date: (1985-1994); Title: [Unpublished creative writing]. u.p., n.d., pp??. 2707 s-units).
- (30) Miss, let's go down *before anyone sees us*. (avoidance) (BNC: Date: (1985-1994); Title: 39 convs rec. by 'Josie' (PS555) with 34 i's, 4491 utts, and over 59 mins 42 secs of recs)
- (31) All errors must be resolved *before the information can be updated*. (preparation) (BNC: Date: (1985-1994); Title: Lifespan computer manuals. Corporate. u.p., n.d., pp. ??. 15278 s-units)

The important point to emphasize in this characterization of the semantics of *before* is that underlying the various pragmatic uses exemplified by these examples there is still in all of them a basic sense of anteriority and relative temporal ordering.

The introduction to *before* in this section and the preceding one has served to establish a brief overall picture of the syntax and semantics of this linker (particularly its basic non-narrative meaning of anteriority) as an appropriate contextualization of the more specific topic of this paper. As already mentioned, the temporal-narrative distinction exists only in a corner of this system, i.e. in clausal constructions in sentence-final position (with one possible exception, cf. below): narrativity concerns the sequencing of situations building up a storyline and thus crucially involves clausal expressions. What emerges from the general description of *before* above is that in the temporal-narrative distinction, temporal is unmarked and narrative is marked. The temporally specifying use of *before* is possible with all its complements and in all positions, while narrative *before* is restricted to a particular manifestation of its syntactic potential and is used for a special effect.

### **3. *Before* as a Narrative Linker**

As we will see, full-force narrativity in *before*-clauses is rather rare, yet this construction is fully productive whenever its special effect is textually appropriate. To establish the nature of this effect, I turn first to very clear cases of narratively used *before*. Later (in section 4) I will point to a certain gray area between temporal and distinctly narrative *before* and suggest a finer-tuned classification. Let us first take another look at examples (3) and (4) (repeated here for your convenience):

- (3) They heard her explanation *before Jack called her parents.* (temporal)
- (4) They had hardly heard her explanation *before Jack burst out crying.* (narrative)

In these examples the *before*-clauses look very similar, and it is tempting to analyze them exactly the same way, i.e. as subordinate adverbial clauses with *before* as a subordinating conjunction. However, the temporal-narrative distinction is not simply a matter of intuitive interpretation of a given construction. Once we put the distinction to the test we discover that it has substantial formal repercussions that cannot simply be ignored: temporally and narratively linked clauses are both notionally and formally distinct, and this should be recognized in our description of them. In Bache (2016:275ff.) I summarized a number of characteristic differences between temporal and narrative *when*-clauses already recorded in the literature (Declerck 1997:218, 222ff.; Couper-Kuhlen 1988, 1989) and added a few myself. Interestingly, both the more formal ones and the pragmatic ones apply to distinctly narrative *before*-clauses as well. Let me begin with the formal ones.

### 3.1. Clefting

Temporal *before*-clauses allow clefting while narrative *before*-clauses do not (or change their status to temporal when cleaved):

- (21) He arrived *before the ceremony began*. (temporal)

→ It was *before the ceremony began* that he arrived.

- (32) When we arrived, we were escorted to the 3rd floor Conference Room where we barely had time to sit down *before in came Governor McAuliffe*.

(<http://www.hydroassoc.org/virginians-bring-hydrocephalus-awareness-to-the-governor/>; access date: 5 June 2017)

→ \*It was *before in came Governor McAuliffe* that we barely had time to sit down.

By allowing clefting, temporal *before*-clauses behave like adjuncts, i.e. like adverbials fully integrated in the structure of a main clause (cf. Quirk et al. 1985:1071), while narrative *before*-



clauses, by not allowing clefting, behave more like disjuncts and conjuncts, which are less central to the structure of the main clause.

### 3.2. Main Clause Phenomena

Despite the fact that narrative *before*-clauses look like subordinate clauses they display a number of features characteristic of main clauses rather than subordinate clauses (including temporal clauses). One such Main Clause Phenomenon (MCP), or 'root transformation', (Hooper & Thompson 1973; Green 1976; Aelbrecht, Haegeman & Nye 2012) is the possibility of having a fronted adverbial particle followed by full inversion, as in example (32): ... *before in came Governor McAuliffe* and the following:

- (33) I hadn't even had time to get out my camera *before out rushed another jobsworth* to tell me that taking pictures was "yasak."

(<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Hands+off+my+photographs!-a0383531259>;  
access date: 5 June 2017)

Secondly, we encounter instances where instead of having a narrative *before*-clause we have a narrative non-clausal *before*-construction containing an onomatopoeic interjection:

- (34) "Max! No! Stop! Little buddy!" a voice yelled out from outside, accompanied by the sound of a car going out of control, as well as the sound of one's maniacal laughter ... *before suddenly ... CRASH ...*

(<https://www.roleplaygateway.com/roleplay/the-multiverse/characters/percival>; 11  
May 2013, Access date: 23 June 2017)

This phenomenon (which – depending on your definition of a clause – is an exception to the rule that narrative *before* must have a clausal complement) shows that narrative *before*-clauses, unlike temporal clauses, have a degree of illocutionary independence similar to that of main clauses: while the main clause is here declarative, the *before*-construction is exclamatory (for discussion

of clause types and utterance functions, see Bache 2000:44ff.). Temporal clauses are always part of the utterance function of the main clause.

Thirdly, in narrative *before*-clauses the speaker or writer may switch to the dramatic historic present independently of the tense choice in the main clause:

- (35) Joan hadn't waited long before this young chap *comes* up to her and *greets* her.

In temporal clauses this is not possible:

- (36) \*He arrived before the ceremony *begins*.

### 3.3. Actionality

In sentences containing temporal clauses there is no characteristic pattern in the main clause and the temporal clause of 'actionality' (i.e. event/situation types, or *Aktionsarten*, such as stative, dynamic durative, punctual, iterative, etc., see Bache 1982). But in sentences with a narrative *before*-clause, there is a tendency for the main clause to express something unbounded and communicatively incomplete (e.g. a state or a dynamic durative activity) and for the narrative clause to express something bounded and (potentially) communicatively complete (e.g. punctual or telic, often with an added element of suddenness):

- (37) ... he just *kept running* getting faster and faster, before *suddenly* he *missed* a step tripping over his own foot, ...

(<http://www.chickensmoothie.com/Forum/viewtopic.php?f=66&t=2923311>, Paul Walker, January 02, 2016)

- (38) The slates were slick with ice and Ursula *had barely placed* her small, slippered foot on the slope beneath the window before it *slid* out from under her. She let out a little cry, ... (KINDLE: Kate Atkinson *Life after Life*, location 701, page 60)

In these examples the main clauses employ a past catenative progressive (*kept running*) and a past perfect (*had ... placed*), respectively. While the first is generally recognized as unbounded

with respect to actionality, referring as it does to an activity in progress, the second perhaps requires explanation (especially because the past perfect is a frequent choice in a main clause followed by a narrative *before*-clause): although in (38) the placing of the foot itself is a bounded event, the past perfect adds the meaning of 'resulting state' to this bounded event ('the state of having her foot on the slope after placing it there'), and that resulting state is unbounded (Bache 1994), however brief, as in this example. Both expressions are communicatively incomplete in that the receiver will expect more to come when hearing the main clause. In fact, the main clause in (38) cannot stand alone without the subsequent *before*-clause: we could not simply say or write *Ursula had barely placed her small, slippered foot on the slope beneath the window*, and then leave it at that. In (37), by contrast, it is grammatically possible to have the main clause by itself: *He just kept running getting faster and faster*. But even here the textual impact of the past catenative progressive is such that the hearer will expect the speaker to offer more information to justify its relevance: it is mentioned for a reason, as a context for something else (for discussion of aspect and actionality in English, and the textual functions of the progressive form, see Bache 2008:102ff., 2013:89ff.). Both *before*-clauses express something bounded and complete, using in each case a simple past tense to refer to a punctual situation (*missed* and *slid*).

### 3.4. Assertiveness and Focus

While the situation expressed by a temporal *before*-clause is presupposed, the situation expressed by a narrative *before*-clause is asserted (cf. section 2.2). The difference between asserted and presupposed is seen in a sentence like *He arrived before the ceremony began*. Here we intuitively understand the sentence as telling us something about the main clause situation ('him arriving'), and more specifically that it happened before the situation expressed by the *before*-clause ('the ceremony beginning'). The *before*-clause has a supporting role in simply specifying the main clause temporally. Both formally and functionally it is a subordinate clause. In Langacker's

(1991) and Cristofaro's (2003) cognitive linguistic terms, "the profile of one of the two [situations] overrides that of the other" (Cristofaro 2003:33; for discussion of her approach, see Bache 2015:15ff., 2016:279f.). The overriding profile ('him arriving') is associated with superordination and assertiveness while the overridden profile ('the ceremony beginning') is associated with subordination and presupposition. In Matthiessen and Thompson's (1988) rhetorical-structure approach to texts, the main clause codes the "rhetorical nucleus", and the subordinate clause codes the "rhetorical satellite" – a different description of the same textual asymmetry. It is 'him arriving' as specified that is the crux of the message and it is that which invites any immediate further communicative attention: it can be negated, questioned, confirmed, debated, and elaborated on. Thus for example, if speaker A says *He arrived before the ceremony began*, speaker B may react by saying *No, he didn't*, but she could not say *No, it didn't* (with reference to the *before*-clause content). Or speaker B might say *Really?*, to which speaker A may confirm her original assertion by saying *Oh yes, he did, but only just!* Here speaker A couldn't say: *Oh yes, it did!* (again with reference to the situation expressed by the *before*-clause).

If we place sentences with a narrative *before*-construction in the same kind of dialogue we find that it behaves differently from its temporal counterpart. If speaker A says *They had hardly heard her explanation before Jack burst out crying*, speaker B could react to the situation expressed by the *before*-clause by saying *No, he didn't. Jack never cries!* Or speaker B might again say *Really?*, to which speaker A may respond by saying *Oh yes, he did. I've never seen him like that before!* Unlike a temporal *before*-clause, a narrative *before*-clause is assertive and may serve as the primary prompt for further dialogue.

Even tag-questions, which normally link anaphorically to the main clause subject and verb (as in *He arrived before the ceremony began, didn't he?*), cannot be ruled out as an extension to a narrative *before*-construction, compare:

- (39) \*He arrived before the ceremony began, *didn't it*?

(40) (?) They had hardly heard her explanation before Jack burst out crying, *didn't he?*

While (39) is completely out of the question, (40) is more acceptable, especially if spoken with falling, low intonation to weakly reinforce or signal expected acceptance of the statement expressed by the *before*-clause.

However, we should not jump to the conclusion that in narrative constructions the main clause and the *before*-clause simply switch their standard roles as identified in sentences with temporal *before*-clauses (where the *before*-clause offers contextualization of the main clause situation, thus supporting the assertion made by the main clause). While a sentence with a temporal *before*-clause consists of an assertion and a presupposition, a sentence with a narrative *before*-clause consists of two assertions, where the one expressed by the *before*-clause is in fact pragmatically the stronger. That the main clause also expresses an assertion is seen in e.g. the following sentence where a tag-question is added immediately after the main clause without this reducing the narrative impact of the subsequent *before*-clause:

(41) *They had hardly heard her explanation, had they,* before Jack burst out crying.

With the shift in status from presupposition to assertion in narrative *before*-clauses, there is also a shift in temporal focus. In sentences with a temporal *before*-clause like:

(21) He arrived *before* the ceremony began.

the temporal focus is on X ('him arriving'): X gets specified as happening before Y ('the ceremony beginning'). In narrative examples like:

(4) They had hardly heard her explanation *before* Jack burst out crying.

the focus is on Y as happening *immediately after* X. In the terminology used in our comparative approach to *before* in section 2.2, the time of X in (21) is in the comparative focus while the time of Y is the comparative standard. In (4) it is the time of Y that is in the comparative focus and the time of X that serves as the comparative standard.

### 3.5. The Down-Ranking Potential of the Main Clause

As argued in the preceding section, the main clause provides contextualization for the situation expressed by a narrative *before*-clause. This means that it is often possible to paraphrase such a sentence by reverting the formal status of the two clauses:

(42) He wasn't halfway up the stairs *before I threw the phonebook again*.

([https://www.reddit.com/r/childfree/comments/2rpffl/family\\_fined\\_for\\_noisy\\_children\\_in\\_abbotsford\\_bc/](https://www.reddit.com/r/childfree/comments/2rpffl/family_fined_for_noisy_children_in_abbotsford_bc/); access date: 27 June 2017)

(43) *Before he was halfway up the stairs* I threw the phonebook again.

(44) Sadie had thought at first it was her straining eyes, *before she realized that the room's dull glaze was actually caused by a thick layer of dust*. (KINDLE: *The Lake House*, location 570, p. 43)

(45) *Having thought at first it was her straining eyes*, Sadie realized that the room's dull glaze was actually caused by a thick layer of dust.

Here (42) and (44) contain a main clause followed by a narrative *before*-clause while (43) and (45) are rough paraphrases in which the original main clause situation (X) of (42) and (44), respectively, is now expressed by a subordinate clause, and the original *before*-clause situation (Y) is expressed by a main clause. The former main clause expression in (42) and (44) has assumed adverbial function in relation to the new main clause expression of Y. The near-synonymy in these pairs of examples is indicative of the contextual nature of X and of a special relationship between X and Y, but it is important also to note what is different between (42) and (43) and between (44) and (45). The difference is a stylistic one: (42) and (44) offer a somewhat livelier account than (43) and (45), which come across as rather factual. Our description of narrative *before*-clauses must take this into account and, as we will see, it will do so by invoking

the notion of 'functional superordination' in section 3.8 below (cf. also Bache 2016:280, 290ff.). This notion depends, among other things, on two kinds of cohesion, to which we now turn.

### 3.6. Cohesion: Actionality

The special pattern of actionality noted in sentences with narrative *before* in section 3.3 above (and which is present also in the other narrative constructions looked at so far) helps create a certain kind of progressive (or cataphoric, forward-directed) textual cohesion: by expressing something unbounded the main clause is communicatively incomplete, thus making the listener expect more to come, and the subsequent *before*-clause meets that expectation by expressing something bounded. Two more examples:

- (46) I *stood there for hours, waiting*, before *suddenly things returned* to normal.  
(<http://www.tickld.com/x/wh/people-share-the-creepiest-unexplainable-occurrence-theyve-experienced/p-9>; 24 February 2017; access date: 29 June 2017)
- (47) She *had scarcely recovered her composure* from that frantic evening before he *invited* her to join him on the royal yacht Britannia during Cowes Week. (BNC; Date: (1985-1994); Title: Diana: her true story. Morton, A. London: Michael O'Mara, 1993, pp. 1-90. 1894 s-units)

The stative, unbounded nature of X expressed by the main clause ('me standing there for hours, waiting' and 'the state of having scarcely recovered her composure ...') creates an element of anticipation and the sudden, dynamic, bounded nature of Y in the *before*-clause ('things suddenly returning to normal' and 'him inviting her to join him ...') offers resolution. The rhetorical focus is thus directed from the main clause to the *before*-clause. The speaker's textual strategy in choosing a narrative *before*-construction is to 'set the scene' in the main clause for what is to come in the *before*-clause. While the textual cohesion is progressive in such constructions, textual cohesion in sentences with temporal *before*-clauses is regressive (or anaphoric, backward-directed), the

information offered being simply appended as contextualization of the situation expressed by the preceding main clause.

### 3.7. Cohesion: Polarity

Actionality is not the only possible textual tie in sentences with a narrative *before*-clause. Polarity is sometimes a factor too, and in this respect sentences with narrative *before* differ from sentences with narrative *when*. The observant reader will have noticed that some of the sentences with narrative *before* looked at so far not only use a past perfect in the main clause but also one of the following three negative adverbials *hardly*, *scarcely* or *barely*, as in:

- (4) They had *hardly* heard her explanation *before* Jack burst out crying.
- (38) Ursula had *barely* placed her small, slippered foot on the slope beneath the window *before* it slid out from under her.
- (47) She had *scarcely* recovered her composure from that frantic evening *before* he invited her to join him on the royal yacht Britannia during Cowes Week.

In these examples the communicative incompleteness of the main clause is a result not only of the choice of past perfect tense with its resultant-state meaning but also the presence of the italicized negative adverb. Although the negative adverb in each case technically makes the main clause negative,<sup>9</sup> the scope of the negation is limited. In fact the negative adverb does not as such negate the proposition made by the rest of the clause in isolation: in (4) they did hear her explanation, in (38) Ursula did place her foot on the slope, and in (47) she did recover her composure. Instead the negative adverb ties in with *before* and has the *before*-clause in its scope: *hardly ... before ... / barely ... before ... / scarcely ... before ...* The general meaning shared by these collocations is 'almost not before ...': although X is positively factual, i.e. happened, it almost did not happen before Y. In other words, in conjunction with *before* the negative adverb creates a sense of strong immediacy: Y happened immediately or promptly after X. This is a



strong cohesive tie which supplements the tie established by actionality, and which helps the switch of comparative focus from X to Y.

The textual cohesion created by the three adverbials can be further strengthened by fronting them – a syntactic operation which triggers partial inversion in the main clause and thus signals its communicative incompleteness even more strongly:

(48) *Hardly had they heard* her explanation before Jack burst out crying.

(49) *Barely had Ursula placed* her small, slippered foot on the slope beneath the window before it slid out from under her.

(50) *Scarcely had World War II ended before* the New York-based real-estate development firm of Levitt & Sons – Abraham was the father, William and Alfred the sons – saw the future and moved immediately to seize it.

Even standard negation (operator negation by means of *not* rather than by other triggers of negative meaning) may add to the progressive cohesion:

(42) He wasn't halfway up the stairs *before I threw the phonebook again*.

(51) Sure enough, I *hadn't waited long before* the phone went, with two local jobs to keep me from being idle.

(<http://fourwheelsanywhere.blogspot.dk/2013/02/uluru.html>; 23 February 2013; access date: 27 June 2017)

In these examples we get a sense that Y (the situation expressed by the *before*-clause) immediately affects (stops short, prompts, or interrupts) X. The contribution of the negation becomes clear when we compare (42) to its positive counterpart in (52):

(52) He was halfway up the stairs before I threw the phonebook again.

Although the *before*-clause in (52) is also narrative, its stylistic effect is not quite as dramatic as that of the *before*-clause in (42): through its lexical choices the main clause signals positive, if partial, accomplishment and is thus similar to unbounded expressions with e.g. the progressive

form. The cohesive tie between main clause and *before*-clause is somewhat weaker than in (42), relying exclusively on the unbounded-bounded actionality pattern in the sentence.

### 3.8. Functional Superordination

In my (2016) paper on narrative *when* I concluded that the special effect of the narrative clause was achieved by it 'transposing' the narration to a higher level than the ordinary narrative level of the preceding main clause. The *when*-clause is in other words functionally superordinate, not to a subordinate clause but to a main clause (Bache 2015:15, 2016:280f.), and it is this being in a sense 'super-superordinate' that makes a narrative *when*-construction stylistically marked. Not only does it attract the temporal focus of the sentence as a whole (having an overriding situational profile and assuming the status of rhetorical nucleus) but it does so against the background of a situation itself syntactically framed as superordinate by being expressed by a main clause: the narrative clause takes its onset to a higher textual level from a main clause. The same applies to the clearest cases of narrative *before*-clauses: they too are functionally superordinate to the main clauses they follow. Being functionally superordinate to a main clause does not make a narrative *when*- or *before*-clause less dependent on the main clause than a functionally (and syntactically) subordinate temporal *when*- or *before*-clause. As pointed out in Bache (2016:280), to reach a higher level of textual intensity, the narrative clause needs to have the main clause strike a neutral level of narration. The special effect achieved is a result of the combination of two of the characteristics mentioned above: the assertive weak-strong composition and progressive textual cohesion. It is the weakly assertive factual main clause that secures an ordinary narrative level, and it is progressive textual cohesion that transposes the narration to a higher assertive level from that onset. The notion of functional superordination is similar to Matthiessen & Thompson's notion of rhetorical nucleus and Langacker's and Christofaro's notion of overriding profile, but in addition it captures more precisely the complex relationship entered into by a functionally

superordinate narrative *before*-clause to a formally superordinate main clause. Functional superordination ties in well with the presence of formal Main Clause Phenomena in narrative *before*-clauses, as noted in section 3.2 above, and unlike the other approaches, my approach takes the role of syntactic level into the equation.

One consequence of this description of narrative *before*-clauses is that the comparative approach to *before*-clauses suggested in section 2.2 above, though an appropriate starting point, is insufficient to explain narrative constructions precisely enough. In sentences containing temporal *before*-clauses we found that the time of X was in the comparative focus and the time of Y served as the comparative standard. Significantly these roles are reversed in sentences containing narrative *before*-clauses so that the time of X serves as the comparative standard and the time of Y is in the comparative focus. But in itself this is not enough to explain the special effect of such constructions. We also need to refer to the special combination of a main clause assertion with a subsequent pragmatically stronger assertion, as well as the progressive cohesion created by the choices of actionality, and sometimes also by polarity.

The characteristics presented above capture the clearest cases of narrative *before*-clauses. But as indicated at the beginning of section 3, there is a certain gray area between temporal and narrative use of *before* where only some of the characteristics apply, and this calls for a finer categorization of *before*-clauses. That is the subject of the next section.

#### **4. Degrees of Narrativity**

##### **4.1. Context-Thematization and *before*-Rhematization**

As noted by Declerck (2006:731-735), examples like the following should be included in the discussion of narrative *before*-clauses (2006:733):

(53) It was 7 p.m. *before he arrived in London.*

(54) It was the following holidays *before they fought again.*

Declerck treats these as clefts where the main clause simply highlights the time of Y. They can both be paraphrased by means of *It was not until ... that* (*It was not until 7 p.m. that he arrived in London / It was not until the following holidays that they fought again*). Since the only situation expressed by the sentence as a whole is Y (the main clause simply identifying a temporal aspect of Y), the *before*-clause "pushes forward the action" (Declerck 2006:732), and it is therefore tempting to classify this as a special type of narrative *before*-clause, as suggested by Declerck.

He also discusses examples like the following (Declerck 2006:734):

(55) It was not long *before they fought again*.

(56) It didn't last long *before Morrison was shifted back to outside linebacker*.

but it is not entirely clear whether he regards them as narrative or simply factual. The implication, however, is that they are to be categorized as narrative like (53) and (54). Declerck considers (55) a kind of cleft like (53) and (54) but suggests an analysis of (56) in terms of extraposition. What they all share is that the main clause offers temporal contextualization of Y.

Examples like (53) to (56) must be accommodated in a description of the temporal-narrative distinction because they obviously share certain features with the genuinely narrative *before*-clauses discussed in section 3 above. One such feature is that, in addition to its contextualizing role, the main clause in examples like (53) to (56) is communicatively dependent on the subsequent *before*-clause, and we even encounter cases of intensification by means of polarity (cf. examples (55) and (56)). But despite these features it is in my view not unproblematic to categorize such examples as truly narrative. Although the *before*-clauses in (53) to (56) "push[...] forward the action" (Declerck 2006:732) by expressing Y, the communicative prominence of Y is weaker than in sentences with genuinely narrative *before*-clauses. The reason for this is that the overall construction is a special syntactic device normally employed for emphatic identification of an element of a situation potentially expressed by a main clause (in the case of cleaving) or for reasons of weight and focus (in the case of extraposition). There is thus

no real *situational* X in the main clause but rather an element of Y recruited for special mention. 'X' is simply an identification of some element and typically (though not inevitably) employs for its expression a form of BE as predicator and the prop word *it* as subject. The element recruited is often temporal (as in (53) to (56)) but it could be some other related contextual information:

- (57) It was *dark* before Jane reached the village.
- (58) It was *another two miles* before Jane reached the village.
- (59) It was already *very windy* before Jane reached the village.
- (60) It took *three more drafts* before we finally hit on the right formulations.

We can even have fairly elaborate contextual information:

- (61) I watch Sean for what seems forever, but actually it is only *one more verse and a rousing chorus* before he turns and notices me. (COCA: Date: 2014; Publication information: Winter2013/2014, Vol. 39 Issue 4, p153-165. 13p.; Title: Rock-a-bye, Ute; Author: WINSOR, MARY; Source: FIC: Ploughshares)

The fact that the main clause is situationally 'thin' (i.e. typically without e.g. an agent, a substantial content verb and other participants) means that it does not establish a solid narrative level from which the *before*-clause can transpose Y to an even higher level. Quite on the contrary, the *before*-clause in examples like (53) to (61) remains at a rather factual narrative level.

As mentioned, we do find intensifying polarity in Declerck's examples, but there is little restriction on the choice of actionality in the *before*-clause:

- (62) It was not long before the child *was playing* with the other children.

In this example quoted by Declerck himself (2007: 734), Y is clearly and unproblematically an unbounded activity.

Note also that in both cleft sentences and sentences with extraposition, the assertive power of the main clause remains unchallenged by the *before*-clause:

(53) A: *It was 7 p.m. before he arrived in London.*

B: No, *it wasn't!* / \*No, *he didn't!*

(60) A: *It took three more drafts before we finally hit on the right formulations.*

B: No, *it didn't!* / \*No, *we didn't!*

B's response here appropriately picks up the subject and predicate of the main clause but not of the *before*-clause. What this means is that the main clause makes a circumstantial element the main theme of the sentence as a whole, and this reduces the narrative effect of the *before*-clause. The textual strategy employed by the speaker or writer is to present a certain contextual meaning in relation to a situation, not to present a situation Y as dramatically occurring against the background of another situation X. I therefore regard sentences like (53) to (60) as context-thematizing constructions rather than as truly narrative constructions. Although the *before*-clause in such sentences expresses some new situation in the storyline (and thereby resembles a genuinely narrative *before*-clause), it does so in relation to some foregrounded contextual information. In other words, the *before*-clause completes the sentence after context-thematization and will thus be said to serve a rhematization purpose. By contrast, a genuinely narrative *before*-clause introduces a new theme.

#### 4.2. Neutral-Narrative *before*-Clauses

Declerck (2006:732) offers other examples of narrative *before* which are less marked with respect to narrativity than the examples presented in section 3 above:

(63) Instead of entering the house at once he waited some time *before* he pushed the key into the lock.

(64) They both stood panting for a moment, *before* the old man said: "I'll take off me boots."

Unlike examples (53) to (62), these sentences refer to X and Y as rather independent situations (of 'waiting' and 'pushing' in (63) and 'standing panting' and 'saying' in (64)) and they express these situations as sequential (basically X before Y) but unlike sentences containing a temporal *before*-clause, the focus on the two situations is more balanced and shared: 'X and then Y'. The textual strategy is not to contextualize or specify X in terms of Y but to move the narration forward with a sequence of new situations, and in that sense the *before*-clause "pushes forward the action" and qualifies as a narrative clause. But there is little dramatic effect and no sense of functional superordination. In other words, we have something in-between a temporal and a narrative clause. I refer to examples like (63) and (64) as neutral-narrative, as opposed to the examples in section 3, which I refer to as intensive-narrative. These terms are meant in a technical sense to indicate degrees of narrative effect in the relationship between main clause and *before*-clause, not as descriptions of the nature of the situations expressed. Thus we find intensely dramatic events described by a neutral-narrative construction:

- (65) She jumped, her heart racing, *before* she realized it was only her phone, vibrating in her pocket. (KINDLE: Kate Morton *The Lake House*; location 5798, p. 474)
- (66) Mr Maddock, of Battery Point, stepped out in front of the truck in Macquarie St, *before* he was dragged from the road by angry onlookers. (COLLINS: doc.subcorpus: oznews; doc.id: NA4--041216; doc.dday: 16; doc.mnth: 12; doc.year: 2004; doc.period: 2004-2005; doc.titl: The Mercury, Sunday Tasmanian; doc.ctry: OZ; doc.textform: Newspaper; doc.domain: news; doc.publ: Davies Brothers; doc.crte: © Davies Brothers Pty Ltd.; doc.brta: tabloid)

Here the sentences describe dramatic events, but there is no functional superordination in the *before*-clauses as a result of cohesion (triggered by actionality and/or polarity): the main clauses describe bounded situations and the *before*-clauses simply describe what happened next.

Often non-finite *before*-clauses are neutral-narrative:

- (67) After his departure from Basie, Williams spent the 1940s playing in various parts of Michigan, *before moving to California and joining Roy Milton's prototype R&B band*. He later worked as a blues guitarist with Eddie 'Cleanhead' Vinson, *before teaming up again with McShann*, with whom he toured and recorded sporadically. (COLLINS: doc.subcorpus: times; doc.id: NB1--040524; doc.dday 24; doc.mnth: 05; doc.year: 2004; doc.period: 2004-2005; doc.titl: Times, Sunday Times; doc.ctry: UK; doc.textform: Newspaper; doc.domain: news; doc.publ: Times Newspaper Ltd.; doc.crte: © Times Newspapers Ltd.; doc.brta: broadsheet)
- (68) In Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, two Indian men, Farishta and Chamcha, fall out of an aeroplane and hang suspended in the air *before landing on the shore of Britain*, where they begin to reconstruct their identities. (BNC: Date: (1985-1994; Title: So very English: a Serpent's Tail compilation. London: Serpent's Tail, 1990, pp. ?? 2633 s-units)

We typically get neutral-narrative constructions in both fiction and accounts of real events as an alternative to building up the storyline by means of sequences of paratactic main clauses. Stylistically the construction offers elegant variation in the presentation of a complex plot. A neutral-narrative *before*-clause is either assertive (if finite) or non-assertive (if non-finite), but always factual (presenting the situation as having taken place).

In fiction the neutral-narrative construction is regularly used to mediate the transition from description of situations to direct speech, as in (64) and the following examples:

- (69) Some soft, incredulous throat-clearing filled a brief pause *before Tapp said unemphatically*, 'Really.' And then, 'You're ... seeing this man?' (KINDLE: Ian McEwan *Sweet Tooth*; location 4108; p. 336)
- (70) "Oh, I see," said Olive. She considered for a moment *before adding quickly*, "Statistically speaking, it doesn't seem you'd have two women die of the same



thing two nights in a row." (KINDLE: Elizabeth Strout *Olive Kitteridge*; location 1704, p. 112)

- (71) But she waved a hand and sighed, and settled herself against the back of the pew *before she said, musingly*, "I like working there." And she had. (KINDLE: Elizabeth Strout *Olive Kitteridge*; location 1962, p. 129)

The neutral-narrative construction is also particularly frequent in sports commentaries (which of course often focus on sequences of events):

- (72) They led by seven heading into the closing ten minutes *before Longford kicked 11 of the last 12 scores*. The Longford players went wild at the final whistle. So did their supporters. (NOW: Country/date: IE 2016 (16-05-13); Title: Silverware is just a pipe dream, but there's glory in the little victories ...; Source: <http://www.independent.ie/sport/gaelic-games/gaelic-football/silverware-is-just-a-pipe-dream-but-theres-glory-in-the-little-victories-for-leinsters-legion-of-nohopers-34713882.html>)
- (73) Akowuah converted a 35th penalty to put Medeama into the lead in the first half *before Bennett Ofori scored the much needed second goal in the 65th minute*. (NOW: Country/date: GH 2016 (16-05-19); Title: Medeama through to CAF Confederation Cup group stage; Source: <http://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/sports/soccer/201605/279625.php>)
- (74) Chasing 234 to win, Kenya lost openers Dhiren Gondaria (11) and Irfan Karim (3), leaving them on 19 for 2 but a third wicket stand of 48 runs between Maurice Ouma and Collins Obuya got Kenya to 67 *before Obuya was run out for 16 runs*. Ouma and Karan Kaul then put on 13 for the fourth wicket *before the two fell in quick succession*, leaving the board at 80 for 5. (NOW: Country/date: KE 2016 (16-05-20); Title: Kenyans triumph in warm-up match away in Australia; Source:

[http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2016/05/21/kenyans-triumph-in-warm-up-match-away-in-australia\\_c1354922](http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2016/05/21/kenyans-triumph-in-warm-up-match-away-in-australia_c1354922))

But the neutral-narrative construction is used in the presentation of any sequence of events, even the movements of stock-market figures:

- (75) The rupee resumed lower at 66.78 per dollar as against Thursday's closing level of 66.62 and moved down further to 66.83 *before finishing at 66.77*, showing a loss of 15 paise or 0.23%. (NOW: Country/date: IN 2016 (16-05-13); Title: Rupee falls for 2nd day, down 15 paise to 66.77;  
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/Rupee-falls-for-2nd-day-down-15-paise-to-66-77/articleshow/52257078.cms>)

As we see in all these examples, the effect of using the neutral-narrative construction is to signal the arrival at a crucial point in a sequence (of two or more situations) which then may or may not serve as a platform for new events, or give rise to comments or elaboration. In that respect, the *before*-clause expresses a juncture in the sequence of situations making up the narration.

#### 4.3. A New Categorization of *before*-Clauses

The picture that emerges is that rather than having a simple binary, equipollent temporal-narrative contrast in connection with *before*-clauses, we have a number of constructions displaying different degrees of narrativity: at its purest, narrativity is characterized by a number of formal and functional features (as described in section 3), but when we consider actual usage more closely, we see a more complex scenario with two other main types of construction which fall somewhere in-between the two extremes of the temporal and intensive-narrative types. In other words, we have a cline of constructions categorized according to textual function and degree of narrativity. The four main types are here listed and defined in textual and formal terms:

### **1. Temporal specification:**

Y serves to specify/contextualize X. Comparative focus is on X.

*Before*-clause is non-narrative and non-assertive.

*(He arrived before the ceremony began)*

### **2. Rhematization:**

Main clause thematizes a contextual aspect of Y. The core of Y serves as rheme.

Comparative focus is on the contextual aspect expressed by the main clause as theme. *Before*-clause is non-narrative and non-assertive.

*(It was dark before she reached the village)*

### **3. Neutral-narrative function:**

Y is what happens next in a sequence. Comparative focus is shared between X and Y, or slightly balanced in favor of Y as marking a juncture in a narrative sequence of situations. *Before*-clause is weakly narrative and may be assertive (if finite) or non-assertive (if non-finite), but always factual.

*(A brick flew over the wall before hitting a small kid)*

### **4. Intensive-narrative function:**

X serves as situational context for Y. Y receives comparative focus and is functionally superordinate to X. *Before*-clause is intensely narrative and assertive.

There is a progressive cohesive tie between main clause and *before*-clause.

*(They had hardly heard her explanation before Jack burst out crying)*

As we have seen there is some variation even within the categories, especially the last two. In neutral-narrative *before*-clauses, the presence of assertiveness is dependent on the predicator being finite, and in intensive-narrative *before*-clauses, the exact degree of narrative intensity depends on whether functional superordination is created by actionality or polarity alone or by both.

In the second category, thematization may be created by clefting or by extraposition, as we have seen, but we also find existential constructions with *there* and idiomatic expressions with *matter of time*, as in the following examples, respectively:

- (76) *There is a long way to go before* women can actually run on the road in the evening in NCR. (NOW: Country/date: IN 2016 (16-05-22); Title: Gurgaon's moonlight marathon; Source: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/events/gurgaon/Gurgaons-moonlight-marathon/articleshow/52387649.cms>)
- (77) Palestinian and Israeli officials expect that *it is only a matter of time before* A.L.F. activists begin to fight. (TIME: date: (2001/08/27); Title: Saddam's Move; Author: MATT REES; Source: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000623,00.html>)

Intensive-narrative examples are relatively rare, and one gets few hits in random general corpus searches. In my core corpus there are only 14 sentences containing an intensive-narrative *before*-clause, while there are lots and lots of temporal, context-thematizing, and neutral-narrative examples. On the other hand, it is quite easy to search more specifically for examples with strong polarity cohesion, i.e. combinations like *hardly + before*, *scarcely + before*, *barely + before*, and expressions of suddenness emphasizing the bounded actionality of the clause (*before suddenly*), etc. and in this way elicit many more examples of the intensive-narrative construction type. Intensive-narrative constructions are a productive kind, and they are used for a specific communicative textual purpose. So even if they are relatively rare, it is important to accommodate them in our description as a marked option.

## 5. Conclusion

The temporal-narrative distinction found in *when*-clauses is found also in *before*-clauses, and the two types of narrative clause share a number of formal and pragmatic characteristics. Unlike *when*, however, *before* has an inherently comparative meaning (= 'at an earlier time than'), and this invites a description of sentences with a *before*-clause in terms of the four components of a comparative construction: a gradable property, a comparative marker, a comparative basis, and a comparative focus. Like morphologically compared adjectives, *before* fuses a gradable property and a comparative marker, and thus becomes, in Huddleston & Pullum's terminology, a comparative governor. The comparative approach to *before*-clauses goes some of the way towards explaining the difference between temporal and narrative *before*-clauses: while a truly temporal *before*-clause expresses a comparative basis (the time of Y) and retains the comparative focus on the main clause (the time of X), a narrative *before*-clause attracts the comparative focus and leaves it to the main clause to express the comparative basis. In other words, the main clause and the *before*-clause switch roles with respect to comparative basis and focus – which is easy to demonstrate by changing the formal status of the two clauses without this affecting the basic meaning of the sentence.

However, this is not the whole story. Like narrative *when*-clauses, the clearest examples of narrative *before*-clauses display functional superordination as a result of the combination of a special pattern of assertiveness with a special pattern of cohesion. In sentences with an intensely narrative *before*-clause, both the main clause and the *before*-clause are assertive, with the *before*-clause pragmatically the more strongly assertive of the two. At the same time, there is progressive cohesion in such sentences in that the main clause creates anticipation by being communicatively incomplete whilst the *before*-clause creates resolution by expressing a foregrounded addition to the storyline. This special cohesive pattern is a result of the choice of actionality (main clause unboundedness followed by *before*-clause boundedness) and/or polarity (with a negative main

clause constituent taking the *before*-clause into its scope rather than the situation expressed by its own co-constituents). The functional superordination of narrative *before*-clauses is often further supported by the presence of Main Clause Phenomena.

This is still not the whole story. Depending on how it is defined, the temporal-narrative distinction turns out to be too crude when applied to my core set of examples. Between the purely temporal and the intensely narrative examples we find another two, very frequent types where the *before*-clause can be said to "push forward the action": the rhematizing use in context-thematizing constructions and the neutral-narrative use. The four types represent four different textual strategies: (1) the speaker/writer may want to use the *before*-clause to offer temporal contextualization of X (where X is expressed by the main clause) by relating it to Y (expressed by the *before*-clause); (2) the speaker/writer may want to thematize some contextual circumstantial information in relation to Y and does this by raising this information to the main clause as a theme while the *before*-clause expresses the core of Y as rheme; (3) the speaker/writer may want to present a sequence of events and choose to mark a certain juncture by employing a *before*-clause, but basically it signals 'and then'; and finally (4) the speaker/writer may decide to 'set the scene' by asserting a situation X in a main clause and use this genuine situation as a circumstantial onset to asserting Y at a higher narrative level – a textual strategy that is carried out by creating a progressive cohesive tie between the two clauses and by allowing Main Clause Phenomena in the *before*-clause.

When I set out to describe the temporal-narrative distinction in relation to *before*, having completed my project on *when*, I had hoped that the exact same descriptive model that I had suggested for *when* would be appropriate also for *before*. That has turned out not quite to be the case. The comparative nature of *before*, as well as its different syntactic properties, requires a somewhat different approach. But the two linkers share the ability to direct their temporal focus to either the main clause or to the clause linked to it, and to support functional superordination.

The direction of focus is textually and pragmatically motivated but, as we have seen, it also has solid formal repercussions applying to both *when* and *before*.

## Notes

1. My sincere thanks to Nina Nørgaard, two anonymous *JEngL* reviewers and *JEngL* editors Matthew Gordon and Peter Grund, for insightful comments and constructive suggestions. I am also grateful to Cindie Aaen Maagaard, Sharon Millar, and Tom Pettitt for giving me native speaker reactions to my data and for helping me get a precise sense of the narrative effect.

2. In addition to *when*, *before*, and *until*, we find narrative usage with *than*-clauses when they follow main clauses with *no sooner*, e.g. *No sooner had World War 2 ended than the Greek civil war broke out* (Sunday Times, 5 July 2015). The effect is very similar to the effect of using *hardly*, *scarcely* and *barely* in a main clause followed by a narrative *before*-clause, see section 3.7.

3. The five samples had a certain overlap of examples: the general sample was found to contain examples that reappeared in the more specialized samples.

4. Kate Atkinson: *Life after Life* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2013): 191 hits; Anthony Doerr: *About Grace* (New York, London, Toronto & Sydney: Scribner, 2010): 141 hits; Karen Joy Fowler: *We are all Completely beside ourselves* (New York: Marian Wood Book, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2013): 83 hits; Kazuo Ishiguro: *Nocturnes* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009): 69 hits; Deborah Levy: *Swimming Home* (High Wycombe: And Other Stories, 2011): 13 hits; Ian McEwan: *Sweet Tooth* (London: Random House, 2012): 139 hits; Charlotte Mendelson: *Almost English* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2013): 84 hits; Kate Morton: *Lake House* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2016): 292 hits; Daniel Silva: *The Fallen Angel* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012): 169 hits; Elizabeth Strout: *Olive Kitteridge* (Pocket Books: London, Sydney, New York & Toronto; 2008): 120 hits; Total number of Kindle hits: 1301 hits.



5. In examples with non-finite clausal complementation, *before* may be viewed as either a conjunction or as a preposition, depending on the formal classification of non-finite clauses as either clausal or nominal.

6. In addition to finite and non-finite clauses, *when* may also take preposition groups and adjectival modifiers as a complement in elliptical constructions like *When in doubt, please consult our front desk* and *When unhappy, one doubts everything*.

7. I am here ignoring the non-temporal use of *before*, cf. section 2.2 and note 8.

8. *Before* is also sometimes used with a spatial meaning (= 'in front of'), e.g. *ARMAGH hurlers will this afternoon find themselves playing before their biggest ever crowd* (BNC: Date: (1985-1994); Title: The Belfast Telegraph. 10040 s-units). Spatial *before* is related to temporal *before* in expressing relative 'position'. The relationship is not surprising in view of the fact that time is often construed in spatial terms (e.g. *on Monday / on the roof, in the future / in the box, from noon to dusk / from Paris to London*).

9. That the main clause is overall negative is seen in the unmarked use of a positive polar tag: *They had hardly heard her explanation, had they, before ...* (for discussion of polarity in English, see Bache 2000:88ff.).

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